

Trio jailed in France over links to 2016 jihadist killing of priest

From [Euronews](#) and the French edition of [The Local](#) Court sketch from [AFP via Arab News](#).

A fourth defendant, Rachid Kassim, presumed dead in Iraq, was sentenced in absentia to life in prison for “complicity” in the killing – defendants are tried in France even if they are presumed, but not confirmed, to be dead. He had already received a life sentence in absentia in 2019 for having ordered a failed attack near Notre Dame Cathedral.

Father Jacques Hamel had his throat slit at the foot of the altar on July 26th, 2016, at his small church in Saint-Etienne-du-Rouvray, a working-class suburb of Rouen, Normandy.

The two 19-year-old assailants, Adel Kermiche and Abdel-Malik Petitjean, who also seriously wounded a worshipper after bursting in during mass and taking hostages, were shot and killed by police as they tried to leave the church. They had claimed in a video to be members of the Islamic State, which later called them its “soldiers” retaliating for France’s fight against jihadists in Syria and Iraq.



This file photo taken on March 02 shows a sketch of defendant Farid Khelil appearing at a Paris court in the trial over the murder of Jacques Hamel, an 85-year-old priest in 2016. (AFP)

With the perpetrators dead, the three suspects on trial – Jean-Philippe Jean Louis, Farid Khelil and Yassine Sebahia – were charged with “association in a terrorist act”. During the trial, they asked for forgiveness and

admitted that they voluntarily associated with individuals who were preparing to commit terrorist crimes. But they argued that wasn’t enough to mark themselves as terrorists.

Prosecutors disagreed, and the judges found all of them guilty of criminal association with terrorists.

Jean Louis, 25, was found to have run a Telegram channel in the area which played a central role in spreading jihadist ideas among youth. He was sentenced to 13 years in prison

Khelil, 36, was told he had consistently reinforced the determination of Petitjean, his cousin, to carry out an act of terror. He was sentenced to 10 years. Prosecutors said he was informed of the attack plan and that he had supported it.

Sebahia, 27, meanwhile had visited Kermiche two days before the killing and was found to have been aware of the killers’ jihadist intentions. He was sentenced to eight years, after he had crossed France to join one of the attackers for “religion lessons”.

The Archbishop of Rouen welcomed the verdict and said in a statement “Justice was served. ... (the court) had to convict these men for the good of society.”